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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION: VISIT OF NEA A/S DAVID
WELCH TO THE UAE

1. SUMMARY: The March 27-29 visit of David Welch, US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, to the UAE received prominent coverage in all UAE Arabic and English dailies. Abu Dhabi TV carried a 7-minute interview on the daily program News of the Day with A/S Welch commenting on Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Israeli elections and Hamas. Abu Dhabi TV carried excerpts of Welch's interview during its News of the Day program on March 30, 2006 at 12:00 p.m., 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. UAE TV noted that Welch had praised the strong US-UAE relationship in all areas. END SUMMARY.

A. Arabic Dailies

1. Sharjah-based Pan-Arab daily "Al-Khaleej" (circulation 85,000) ran March 30 article with page 5 photo (Nation Section) under headline "US Assistant David Welch lauds US-UAE ties."

Welch: "We appreciate the bilateral relationship between our countries and consider it very important in all its aspects."

2. Dubai-based Arabic daily "Al-Bayan" (circulation 90,000) ran March 30 page 4 article with photo (Business Section) under headline "US official: P&O deal did not affect US-UAE relations."

Welch: "President George Bush made great efforts to convince the Congress that Dubai Ports World is efficient and capable enough to manage US ports."

3. Abu Dhabi-based Arabic daily "Al-Ittihad" (circulation 65,000) ran March 30 front page article with photo under headline "Welch lauds UAE efforts to achieve stability in Iraq and Afghanistan" and in the Business Section under the subhead "The era when Syria had custody over Lebanon is over."

Welch: "We appreciate the efforts taken by the UAE government to achieve stability and rebuild Afghanistan and Iraq. We do not the play the role of custodian over Lebanon."

4. Dubai-based Pan Arab daily "Emaratallyoum" (circulation 25,000) ran March 30 page 22 article (Foreign Section) under headline "US official: P&O deal will not affect US-UAE relationship".

Welch: "The wise leadership of the UAE played a prominent role in shortcutting the problem when it handed the management of the ports to a US company."

5. Dubai-based Pan Arab daily "Akhbar Al-Arab," (circulation 25,000) ran March 30 page 9 article (Nation Section) under headline "David Welch affirms his country's appreciation of its ties with the UAE."

Welch: "We appreciate the bilateral relationship between our countries and consider it very important in all its aspects."

B. English Dailies

1. Under the headline "US official: No longlasting fallout over DP world issue," and under the sub-head "We praise UAE Ports Authority for the way they handled affair," Dubai-based English Language daily "Gulf News" (circulation 95,000) ran March 30 page 7 article with photo in the Nation Section.

Welch: "US-UAE relations have suffered no long-term fallout over Dubai Ports World decision to transfer its US ports operations to a US authority. Did we learn some lessons from

this? I think absolutely. The American administration has to be careful to make a more convincing case about issues such as foreign investment in strategic areas. And our foreign partners likewise want to pay attention to the political environment in the United States and to make presentations in a way that is responsive to that political environment."

12. Under headline "Welch: Behaviour of Tehran 'worrying' GCC states," and sub-head "N-plan in the hands of a dangerous regime is not accepted," Dubai-based English Language daily "Khaleej Times" (circulation 80,000) ran March 30 article with photo in the Nation Section.

Welch: "The GCC states are justified in their concerns about Iran's nuclear ambitions. We commend the government and the Dubai Ports Authority for the statesmanship the government has shown and the company's recent announcement that it will transfer its US ports operations to a US entity."

With regard to Iran, Welch said: "Definitely, we prefer a diplomatic solution. President George Bush has a clear and fixed idea of what is necessary, but has not taken any option off the table. However, diplomacy is preferred."

Democracy in Arab world:

"... Welch said he had no contacts with former Syrian Vice-President Abdel Halim Khaddam, who now lives in Europe. But he said the US has no objection to talk to him."

1C. TV

11. UAE channel 2 carried a 2-minute report on March 29, citing David Welch, praising US-UAE ties in all fields. Welch lauded the decision taken by the government of Dubai to hand the management of the US ports to an American company to resolve the issue. He added that the UAE and the US are working together to conclude an FTA.

12. Abu Dhabi TV carried a 7-minute interview on the daily program (News of the Day) March 29 with David Welch, commenting on Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Israeli elections and Hamas. Abu Dhabi TV carried excerpts of David Welch's interview on News of the Day March 30 (Noon, 3 p.m. and 6 p.m.).

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